



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **TWO ARRESTED IN ICE PROBE OF FORMER IMMIGRATION CONSULTING BUSINESS**

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and investigators from the San Diego District Attorney’s office arrested two San Diego area residents whose immigration consulting business allegedly defrauded would-be immigrants by charging them to apply for employment-based visas for which they clearly did not qualify.

Arrested late yesterday were Bemilda Ruiz, 36, and her business partner, Jose Cesena-Sotomayor, 57. The two, who are being prosecuted by the San Diego District Attorney’s Office, face felony charges of grand theft and selling false documents to conceal citizenship.

Ruiz, a longtime immigration consultant in the San Diego area, owned and operated a now defunct immigration consulting business downtown called Legal Services Network. It was there ICE agents allege that Ruiz and Cesena met with clients, persuading them to apply for employment-based visas for which they were not eligible.

So far, ICE has identified at least seven people who were defrauded by Ruiz and her partner. Agents estimate these individuals alone lost more than \$30,000 and suspect others may have been victimized.

“ICE will not stand by and allow people to take advantage of vulnerable immigrants and charge exorbitant fees for immigration benefits for which they do not qualify,” said Serge Duarte, acting special agent-in-charge for ICE in San Diego. “We are committed to working closely with the District Attorney’s Office and the Mexican Consulate to identify anyone who may have fallen prey to this scheme.”

ICE began investigating Ruiz and Cesena nearly two years ago after receiving a lead from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Officers with USCIS’ Fraud Detection Unit became suspicious after intercepting more than a dozen immigration benefits applications filed by Cesena that included counterfeit visa approval notices.

Ruiz began working as an immigration consultant in the early 90s, initially as a legal assistant at a local immigration law firm. Several of the victims in this case say they first met with Ruiz while she was still working at the law firm. Ruiz opened Legal Services Network in 1999. The business has since closed.

In its ongoing effort to prevent fraudulent practitioners from preying on the immigrant community, ICE is appealing to anyone who believes the two consultants defrauded them to come forward. Those who have information that may be valuable to this investigation are urged to call ICE's toll-free tip line at 866-DHS-2ICE or the Mexican Consulate in San Diego at (619) 308-9916.

Both Ruiz and Cesena will be arraigned at 1:30pm in Superior Court, Department 12 at 330 West Broadway on Friday, April 1, 2005.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*